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PRACTICE TEACHING--MODELS AND MODULES.

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THE PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT IS TO DISCUSS THE PROBLEMS INVOLVED IN THE OBSERVATION, PRACTICE, AND CRITICISM PHASES OF PRACTICE TEACHING IN THE LANGUAGE TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAM, AND TO GIVE AN ACCOUNT OF THE PROPER USE OF VIDEOTAPE IN THE MORE EFFICIENT AND LESS TIME-CONSUMING PERFORMANCE OF THESE ACTIVITIES. AFTER PINPOINTING THE PROBLEM OF OBSERVATION AS ONE OF BEING ABLE TO PRESENT THE TRAINEE CONSISTENTLY WITH GOOD LANGUAGE TEACHING MODELS AND THAT OF TEACHING PRACTICE AS ONE OF LIMITING THE TEACHING UNIT TO A PERIOD OF TIME RATHER THAN TO A BOOK LESSON, THE ACCOUNT JUSTIFIES, IN GENERAL TERMS, THE FEASIBILITY OF USING VIDEOTAPE TO PRESENT THE BEST MODELS OF THE MOST EFFICIENT TEACHING MODULES IN THE TRAINING OF LANGUAGE TEACHERS. THE MAIN BODY OF THIS DOCUMENT IS DEVOTED TO OUTLINING THE PRACTICAL AND SPECIFIC APPLICATION OF THIS PREMISE TO OBSERVATION IDENTIFICATION ANALYSIS, PRACTICE PREPARATION AND PERFORMANCE, AND CRITICISM. SEE FL 000 636 FOR A COMPANION DOCUMENT. (AB)

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PRACTICE TEACHING: MODELS AND MODULES

William F. Mackey

Most courses for training language teachers include a certain amount of practice teaching. Much of it is done in block practice or in-service training. But there is much variation on the sort and amount of practice teaching required. The purpose of the article is to outline some of the general characteristics of practice teaching and to give an account of some recent improvements.

INTRODUCTION

Most practice teaching can be divided into three phases -- observation, practice and criticism. The teacher in training observes the language teaching of a trained and experienced teacher and tries to imitate him. Criticism of his attempts come either from the master-teacher himself or from the teacher-trainers, supervisors or inspectors, who pass by periodically and supply the comments which they consider appropriate. Sometimes this produces excellent results, especially if the ratio between teacher-trainer or master-teachers and trainees happens to be exceptionally low. Even under the most ideal conditions, however, there is much that has to be left to chance, to the disposition of the master-teacher and the availability of the supervisor.

In the observation phase, there is often little control over the teaching which the trainees are expected to observe, since it has not yet taken place. As a result, the trainee has necessarily to witness, along with the good teaching, a lot of mediocre teaching, without being told which is which. And in order to observe a few techniques, the trainee may have to sit through a whole lesson. In order to reach our objective in the observation phase, therefore, we have to waste a great deal of the trainees' time, and even then, we leave him somewhat uncertain how exactly he should perform.

When we reach the practice phase, there are similar problems. There is often very little control of the trainee's performance. Even after an hour of teaching in the presence of a supervisor, the trainee often receives only a few general comments, which are often vague if only because words and actions referred to have forever vanished. The criticism that the trainee does receive is often haphazard since it depends on what part of the teaching was really observed. What is lacking is the continual feedback and flow of information between the trainer and the trainee which is so necessary for the effecient acquisition of any skill. This is difficult to do while a lesson is in progress.

The problem of observation is one of models. What models of good language teaching can one confidently offer with the assurance that they will not degenerate into mediocre teaching.

The problem of teaching practice is one of modules. Because of the length of the practice lesson, there is a likelihood of the unsupervised trainee developing undesirable teaching habits. And it is impossible to cut out sections of a lesson while it is being taught. What therefore is the most convenient and effective unit? Is it the book-lesson or the period of time? The chief questions of language teaching practice may thus be answered in terms of models and modules.

I MODELS

Modern technology now permits us to overcome some of the drawbacks in the choice of models for practice teaching.[1] Motion pictures and television videotapes make it possible to obtain more variety, range, quality and control in the choice of models of language teaching.

The motion picture film has already been used to supply model lessons, permitting teachers in areas where no

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1. W.F. Mackey, *The New Technology of Teacher Training* (in the press).

model lessons are available to witness some good language teaching. Because of the great expense of film production, however, such films have not been numerous. They are limited to model or sample lessons, some of doubtful value; the medium is not generally used to record the teaching done by trainees.

Videotape, however, in addition to recording and preserving model lessons, also preserves the lessons taught by teachers-in-training, whose teaching may be easily viewed, analysed and commented upon. Much of the time formerly consumed in getting to and from the practice class and in settling down for the lesson, can thus be saved. The medium permits large numbers of trainees to observe small classes without disturbing either the teacher or the learners. Videotape also eliminates the element of uncertainty in model lessons, since unsuccessful ones are simply erased or not used. How many times have teachers in training been told that they were going to witness a model lesson only to find out that it turned out to be nothing of the kind. Videotaped model lessons may also be graded in series from simple to complex, from easy to more difficult.

II MODULES

If teaching performance is to be discussed with any semblance of consistency, it cannot be built around a concept so vague as that of the lesson. For the idea of what constitute a lesson means different things to different persons. It may represent a period to time, which is by no means standard and in which any type or amount of material can conceivably be covered. It may represent an arbitrary division of the course, or a part of a textbook.

For purposes of teacher training, however, it is more convenient to have the teaching unit based on what is taught, not on how long it takes to teach it. A convenient module is the teaching-point. The teaching-point is not based on an arbitrary division of space or time, but on the elements of the language itself, systematically grouped into units for purposes of teaching.

The teaching-point is that group of language elements which are best taught together, small enough in number to be readily absorbed and large or important enough to justify a plan. It may be a group of related words, *(over -- under -- between)*, or expressions, *(yes, please -- no, thank you)*, or even a simple grammatical point like the present continuous tense. The time or space needed to teach the teaching-point will depend on its difficulty, its importance and the particular capacities of the class. A concrete noun series like *(knife -- fork -- spoon -- plate -- cup -- saucer)*, may be worth much less time than the simple preposition *at*. What the trainee analyses, therefore, are the different phases of the teaching of a teaching-point.

III APPLICATIONS

It is with all this in mind that over the past few years we have attempted to develop a procedure of practice teaching centered around the teaching-point as the module and its videotape as the model.

To begin with, the practical training period is divided into the three usual stages -- observation, practice and criticism. These stages may be spread over a period of a few weeks, a few months or a few years, depending on how the practical part of the trainees' programme fits into his professional course for the training of language teachers.

1. Observation

This first stage is divided into two phases -- identification and analysis.

1.1 Identification

A person cannot be expected to give a performance of good language teaching if he has never seen any. Therefore, the first thing is to show the trainee models of

good language teaching that he may observe, study and analyse. These are supplied to him on videotape, on film or on both.

But the trainee can learn from such observation only if he knows what he is looking at. We have to make sure, that he understands what is being performed, that he identifies the parts of the process, and that he looks at the right thing at the right time.

To make sure he knows what is being done, an introductory part of the videotape tells him what the model is about, how many parts it has and what these are. It is best supported by a text and table of contents appearing on the screen. Important as this is, it need take no more than a minute.

As the trainee observes the teaching, it is important for him to know when one part of it ends and the other begins. When a new part begins -- for example, the switch from presentation to verification -- the screen is filled with the main title of this new phase of the teaching.

During the observation of each of these phases, it is also important to attract the trainee's attention to what we want him to observe. This is done through the use of recurring subtitles which remind the observer at all times of the type of activity being performed -- for example, the type of drill being used. At the beginning of the observation stage, these subtitles are supplemented by recorded off-screen comments and explanations coming in before, after or during the action.

At this stage, it is important that the trainee's attention be concentrated on the teaching -- not on the learning. Too many unsuccessful attempts on the part of the learners can only distract from the performance of the teacher. The teaching process is complicated enough to study, even under ideal conditions. To eliminate these unnecessary distractions on the part of the learner and the mistakes in performance on the part of the teacher, we go through a number of re-takes of the same lesson, keeping the best tape. It is only later in

the course that the trainee has to analyse the realities of unsuccessful learning. At this stage, he is observing model lessons, not typical ones.

1.2 Analysis

It is not sufficient to witness good teaching; one must know why it is good and what it is made of.

After having observed a sufficient number of model lessons, the trainee therefore begins to analyse them. His first assignment in analysis is simply to identify the part of the lessons he has already observed, that is, to reconstitute the titles and subtitles. This is done by having him work with copies of the original videotape made before the titles were added, until he is able to come up with divisions sufficiently close to the final product which he has been observing.

As we have said, he first identifies the full titles, which represent the main phases of the teaching of the item -- its presentation, verification, correction, repetition, contextualization, etc. He then reconstitutes the subtitles, which represent the techniques being used in each phase -- choral response, incremental repetition, pointing and naming drills, etc.

With these titles and subtitles in his note-book, and with plenty of space between them, the trainee then proceeds to more detailed analysis of each part. This is done under the direction of the teacher-trainer who poses specific questions to the class of trainees, having them answer while a particular part of the videotape is replayed to them again and again. They are such questions as: What particular type of correction technique is the teacher using now? Is he giving the rule and asking that it be applied? Is he moulding the learners performance by a series of approximations? The result is a complete inventory of what the teacher does in teaching the teaching-point. At the end of each inventory, the tape is replayed to permit the trainees to check the analysis in their note-books. A

number of videotapes are covered in this way until the trainee becomes skilled in objective analysis.

So far, the trainee has been asked to observe only what the teacher does. He has not yet been asked why he does it.

Now, the teacher-trainer replays the models to the class, this time with titles and subtitles. Taking one sequence at a time (sometimes less than a minute), he goes over the inventory of what it contains, replays it, and asks questions on why the teacher proceeds as he does. Why does he ask the question before and not after calling on the learner to answer it? Why does he have the learner face the class? Why does he do this, and why does he do that? At the beginning, the teacher-trainer has to answer most of these questions himself, but as he proceeds, he will find that the trainees, not only know how to analyse the teaching, but are beginning to learn how to evaluate it.

Now that the trainee has some idea of what good language teaching looks like, there is no need for him to waste his time, at this stage, in observing full lessons. He can now proceed to a systematic examination of the different types of techniques available for each phase of the different lesson types-- types of repetition, correction, presentation, diagnosis, etc.

To this end, he studies a different type of videotape. It is a collection of teaching technique demonstrations, part of them from the tape collection, part made specially for the purpose, all appropriately labeled with titles and subtitles. The final tapes in the observation phase are a type of montage which juxtaposes the good and the bad.

2. Practice

Once he has acquired a knowledge of what constitutes good language teaching and the various lesson types and techniques involved, the trainee enters the second stage, that of teaching practice.

It is wasteful to ask a trainee to perform before he knows what he has to teach, in what order and by what means. Before being trained to teach, he must be trained to prepare his lesson. Preparation precedes performance.

The trainee begins by studying the teaching plans on which the now familiar model lessons were based. He checks them with his own analysis of the lessons, comparing what the teacher intended to do with what he actually did. With these as a model, the trainee begins to devise teaching plans of his own.

In making a plan of a teaching-point, the trainee begins with a specific statement on precisely which and what level of skill he expects to convey to the learners. It has to be capable of achievement and link up with the learner's purposes in learning the language.

These plans are corrected by the teacher-trainer and commented upon privately and in groups. The best plans are given to the trainee for polishing up and are kept by him for possible execution in the next stage of the course. Toward the end of the planning stage, the trainee analyses the teaching plans of his colleagues. He proceeds by first identifying the level, the type of lesson, the skills taught, the teaching-points covered, how the teacher uses the text, what sort of formal and semantic analysis he has made of it, the procedures used, their order and proportion.[2]

2.2 Performance

Before performing himself, it is useful for the trainee to see the performance of other trainees, and observe the relation between the teaching plan and its execution.

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2. See Chapters 12 and 13 of W.F. Mackey *Language Teaching Analysis*, London:Longmans 1965; Bloom ington:Indiana University Press 1967.

From the analyses of his colleagues' teaching plans, therefore, the trainee proceeds to a study of their performance. Using the same framework provided by the analysis of the model lessons, he expands and quantifies the study to provide a profile of the teaching. Since this is most time-consuming it is limited to a few teaching-points, each of fairly short duration.

The quantitative analysis is both textual and behavioral. To obtain the textual analysis, the sound-track of the videotape is transferred to magnetic sound tape so that it can be transcribed in the language laboratory on an ordinary tape recorder.

From this transcription, and with the help of the teaching plan, the trainee makes a quantitative study of the speech used both by the teacher and by the learners to supply answers to such questions as: What percentage of the talking is done by the teacher? How much of it is in the language being taught? What percentage is devoted to explanation, questioning, giving a model, correction, and confirmation? How many items are used which have not been taught or learned? Are these ever taught in the lesson? How often are they used? To what extent does the teacher deviate from the method or text he is using? What percentage of the teacher's talk is in the learner's first language? What is it used for -- to translate, explain, correct, give administrative instructions? What percentage of the talking is done by the learners? Of this, what proportion is devoted to choral and what proportion to individual response? In the later, what is the incidence of phonetic, grammatical, lexical and stylistic mistakes? How much of this is corrected and how much left uncorrected by the teacher? Of the corrected mistakes, how many attempts are permitted on the average for phonetic, grammatical and lexical errors? For each category of error, what is the incidence of success and failure?

After figures have been compiled in answer to such questions, the trainee goes to the corresponding videotape and makes a similar quantitative analysis of

the actions of both teacher and learner. How much moving is done by each? What sort is it -- walking, gesture, writing? How much of what is done makes clear what is said?

Finally, checking both words and actions through the videotape, the trainee plots the results on a sequential and cumulative time-scale to obtain a quantitative profile of the teaching which he has analysed.[3]

All the profiles are handed in to the teacher-trainer, who checks them and later uses them to comment on the teaching and to evaluate it.

The trainee is now sufficiently familiar with what constitutes language teaching to take over a class. Under the guidance of a master-teacher, he first elaborates on one of his better teaching plans, selected for him by the teacher-trainer. He then puts the plan into execution while a videotape is made of his teaching.

After the lesson, the trainee studies the videotape of his own teaching and makes an objective and quantitative analysis of it. So, as we have just seen, do a number of his colleagues.

These analyses are submitted to the teacher-trainer, who checks them against the videotape and prepares his criticism.

3. Criticism

The videotape is now re-played to the class of trainees, who make notes for later comment. The first to comment on the teaching is the one who has done it. He is called upon to comment on his own teaching. He then answers questions posed to him by his colleagues on why he did or did not do this or that. This is followed by comments from the group. Finally, the teacher-trainer himself poses such questions as these, on the

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3. W.F. Mackey *The Quantification of Teaching Analysis* (in the press).

quality of the teaching: Is there always a relation between what is said and what is done? How does the teacher get the meaning across? Before drilling an item, does the teacher make sure it is understood? To what extent is the known used to teach the unknown ? How does the teacher find out what is known? What is the quality of the models used? Are correct responses re-inforced? Are better approximations encouraged? Are the mistakes properly diagnosed? How accurate are the responses of the learners? Is the teacher too exacting in certain areas? Is he a victim of over emphasis in others -- as when he stresses the definite article in a sentence to make sure the learner hears the interdental? What is the teacher's technique of correcting? What types of responses are used -- choral, individual? In what proportion? What is the average length in syllabes of the choral responses? Are they too long or too short? How much delay is there between the error and its correction? Between the response and its confirmation? When corrected, is the learner always aware of exactly where he is wrong -- phoneme, stress, grammatical agreement, etc ? Does he know what he is supposed to say instead? What sort of confirmation is there of correct responses and how consistent is it? The teacher-trainer poses these questions while turning to the appropriate sections of the tape to elicit the replies.

Finally, the teacher-trainer supplies his own comments on the teaching before sending the trainee back to do it all over again, with a different class. This gives the trainee an opportunity of correcting his teaching mistakes and of profiting from the comments. It gives him the necessary feedback and reinforcement for the improvement of subsequent teaching.

In criticising the teaching, the teacher-trainer can now pin-point any part of the performance, back track or go forward with great rapidity to compare and contrast, stop the action to enable detailed analysis of one of the trainees movements or turn up the volume for several repetitions in order to comment on what the trainee actually said, or on how he said it.

Although most of these tapes are erased and re-used, sections of some of them are preserved for the videotape archives and later used to make montages. Montage is best done between sessions since it requires long, uninterrupted periods when the videotape equipment is free. The montage of successful teaching that may serve as a model may be transferred to film and copies sent elsewhere. The results of some of the montages are fed into the beginning of the cycle as appropriate material for observation at the first stage. In this way, the content of the course becomes self-improving.

CONCLUSION

Practice teaching, one of the most important parts of a teacher's training, is the one which has attracted the least attention. This time-consuming activity can be made more profitable by the judicious choice and intensive study of carefully prepared models of teaching units based on what there is to teach in the language being taught. These models are observed and commented and their teaching plans are analysed. The plans and teaching of trainees are then analysed and observed by their colleagues, and criticized by the performer and by the teacher-trainer.

The right use of videotape for these activities makes practice teaching more efficient and less time-consuming. Since it can use the best models in the most efficient modules, videotape is destined to become one of the chief instruments for the training of language teachers.